

Geography Awareness Week: An activity resource guide

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Did you know that Geography Awareness Week (GAW) is fast approaching?

Do you know what you are going to do for Geography Awareness Week (GAW) this year?

This activity resource guide presents a list of potential activities that could easily be organized for Geography Awareness Week this year. A similar list was developed by the Graduate Geographers Association at Wilfrid Laurier University a few years ago.

Some of the ideas presented here require greater organization and time commitments while others can easily be put together in relatively short order. Many of the events can be and have been combined together but most can be held separately. All of the events on the list have not been 'field tested' but a great many of them have. Those that were used have been received very well by students, faculty and the university community.

Hopefully, this activity guide can assist with the planning for this year's Geography Awareness Week and help you to increase awareness of geography on university campuses and in communities across Canada!

Geography Awareness Week Activity List

- Coordinate with your library (librarian) to generate a book display in the main lobby of the library or within a display cabinet that highlights books related to the various theme days or geography in general.
- Develop a poster display of recent research from your department for display on the walls of department. Ask each faculty member and/or graduate student if you can borrow a poster they have displayed recently at a conference (**If possible and if department research allows, try to coordinate them with the theme days for GAW). Promotional signs are then posted at 'key' intersections of the university to invite the university community to visit the poster display during Geography week to learn about department research and researchers.
- On a central bulletin board in the department, create a Geography Awareness Week poster that provides a brief description of GAW, illustrates the theme days for the week and highlights the dates and times of any activities occurring during the week.
- Create a bulletin board display – “Geography from Space” – using various satellite images/google earth images, etc. (**Possibly coordinate to link with theme days). A possible sidebar to this is to host a contest where students (e.g. geography and/or other members of the community) enter and attempt to identify what is visible in the image or answer a question about the image. The winner is drawn from all the correct answers at the end of the week.
- A photo contest could be held during the week of GAW or in the week or month leading up to GAW. All the entries could be shown during an event held in the Map library or similar space. The winner(s) could be announced on the Friday of GAW (or following Monday) with those winning images being framed for display in the map library (or around the department) until the following year. Sample categories could be the theme days of GAW or categories such as nature, school, fieldwork, ‘what is geography to you? etc.

- Coordinate with undergraduate/graduate geography student societies to decorate the department with posters, etc highlighting what GAW is, the events you are hosting or the theme days of the week. (e.g. posters, a hanging globe, etc)
- Coordinate the sales of t-shirts earlier in the term (e.g. October) so that they are delivered to the students and faculty just before or during GAW (e.g. November). Students and faculty can then be encouraged to wear their shirts during the week and to the different events.
- An informational poster display could be set up in concourse or common area for your university during GAW. The poster(s) would explain GAW, highlight local events to the university community. The display may also include instruments (e.g. stadia rod), technology (e.g. GPS unit) or field equipment (e.g. box core or weather station) used by the various members of the department while conducting their research. Students (and/or faculty) would be on hand to answer questions from interested people. Student volunteers would be coordinated through the geography student society and could be based on hour or two hour blocks of time.
- A scavenger hunt could be held within the department and university community. Students (geography or non-geography) are provided with a list of questions that have to be answered using poster displays, university signs, departmental knowledge and their own spatial awareness (e.g. On the north side of this building, what office is furthest west?).
- Students wear a t-shirt with a place name on it. They then register themselves and their shirt. Photos can be taken at a specific time after which they are posted on a map hanging in the department (e.g. map library) e.g. -'My parents went to Hawaii and all I got was this t-shirt'

- Provide a short write up or offer to do an interview with the student newspaper or student radio station to explain GAW and the activities you are hosting. Questions they may wish to ask could include “what is GAW”, “Why geography matters” and activities going on during the week at the school. You may also wish to contact community newspaper with a similar write up. Additionally, contacting your university public affairs department so that a write up/photo about GAW can be posted/highlighted on the main university site is also a good idea.
- Movie Night – A free showing of a geography themed movie (e.g. Planet Earth) hosted by a geography student society. It could be held in a classroom on campus with a DVD player in the lecture console. Holding it on campus also allows residential students to attend. Remember to book the room early. Popcorn on a snowy night in November is really good!
- Coordinate a speaker or speakers on one day (or night) during the week to give a talk to the department or in the form of a free public lecture. The lecture would follow a short introduction on GAW, its goals and the weeks activities. This could be faculty members from the department or an invited speaker from another institution or agency. The format could take either a large hall or a coffee house style approach.
- Another form of this would be a seminar series where several graduate students present their research over a lunch on a given day during the week (Coffee and cookies may be provided).
- Coordinate a poster contest with a local public school under a specific theme or a theme day from GAW. (e.g. Students create posters “What is geography?”, ‘How geography affects me?’ or “Geography is....”. Prizes could be awarded such as an atlas for the public schools library.
- Host a ‘Meet the profs’ or ‘Meet the faculty’ night on campus in a wine and cheese or a coffee house type setting.

- Host a geography themed trivia night. All those guests wishing to participate in the contest form a number of teams. The host/quiz master then asks a series of questions related to different fields in geography. At the end of the round, the answers are marked a winner declared before moving on to the next round. Questions should be written up before the game using texts from classes offered in the department or trivia games (e.g. Trivia pursuit) can be utilized.
- A similar event would be a 'Geo-pardy' game with a host/quiz master asking series of questions to three 'contestants' who sit at the front of the larger social gathering. After so many questions, the 'contestants' can switch out for someone else from the crowd. Questions written on paper/cardboard can be taped to a board/blackboard/wall with a corresponding value written on the other side of the question.
- Another similar event could be held in conjunction with a GAW poster display in the central part of the university. People passing by the display could be asked geography related questions (e.g. What is the largest National Park in Canada?) or questions related to a map display (e.g. identify a country). After the people answer the question they could win a piece of candy
- A field trip could be led by a faculty member to a local urban or physical feature as a day trip with the group then getting together for coffee/hot chocolate after the hike. The trip may be coordinated with one of the theme days from GAW. (e.g. – walk to an urban stream or downtown core; tour campus with facilities manager to learn about environmental planning, energy efficiency and recycling efforts on campus)

- Some universities offer programs in May and June where students from local/regional public schools come to the university to participate in different activities hosted by different academic departments. A 'mini' one-day or one afternoon session could be hosted by the geography department during GAW. Invite a geography class from a local high school or public school to visit the department and they take part in some activities and listen to a faculty/students talk briefly about what they do or why geography is important.
- Coordinate an athletic event during the week (grads/undergrads or student/staff?)
- Campus or community clean up - In conjunction with another local community group or local agency (e.g. Ontario – Conservation Authority) organize a community or watershed clean up.
- Bake sale for charity. Treats were 'Geo-themed' (e.g. globe shaped cookies) and the money donated to a charity selected prior to the event. *** Early emails (+ gentle reminders leading up to the event) to ask students/staff/faculty to bake is essential.
- A "Geo-caching" event. Students sign out a GPS from the department (or use their own). They use the GPS to find a set of coordinates at which point they answer questions related to that location. Our event included sites on and around campus and was generally completed in about 1-2 hours. Students could sign up in teams (up to 4 people) and if there was more than one group with all the correct answers, a random draw would determine the winner

Useful Hints:

- Start the process early because November arrives very quickly! ☺ Get a team together to talk about how much can be done.
- For all of these events, remember to take photos to help you promote your events the following year.
- Advertising may include:
 - Word of mouth
 - Emails sent to geography students
 - Posters in and around the department
 - Brief class announcements by faculty or a student representatives from the student geography society
 - Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc)

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If you have any other ideas that you have used at your school and could be added to the list please submit them to jchilds@brocku.ca

If you have any questions about an event or any other comments please let us know?